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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact on parents of the Parents as Teachers early intervention program. Participating were three groups of parents, matched on demographic variables. One group of 21 parents received in-home support and training from parent educators (PAT) during the first 36 months of their child's life. The purpose of the training was to support and promote parents' role as their "child's first teacher." A second group of 22 families requested and received quarterly educational newsletters written by PAT staff and including information provided to PAT families during the first year of their child's life. A third group of 22 families received no services. Children from each group were assessed upon entry into public kindergarten. Findings indicated that the children of PAT parents received significantly higher age equivalency scores than did other children on language and self-help/social skills as assessed by the Early Screening Profiles. Children in newsletter families received significantly higher age equivalency scores on self-help/social skills than children in the control families. The age equivalencies of children in newsletter and control families in language and self-help/social skills were lower than their chronological ages. No significant differences were found among the three groups on measures of cognitive or motor skills, although the children of PAT parents scored higher than did others. The results lend further support to educational policies that endorse school outreach services to actively involve parents in their children's early development and education. (Contains two tables to support statistical research.) (KB)

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Parents as Teachers: Policy Implications for Early School Intervention

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Abstract

The educational impact of an early intervention program entitled Parents as Teachers was assessed using three comparison groups. One group of 21 parents received in-home support and training from parent educators during the first 36 months of their child's life. The purpose of the training was to support and promote parents' role as their "child's first teacher." A second group of 22 families received quarterly educational newsletters during the first year of their child's life. A third group of 22 families received no services. Children from the three family groups were assessed upon entry into public school kindergarten. Demographic variables were used to match the three groups. The children of parents receiving PAT services scored significantly higher than did children from the comparison groups on measures of language and self-help/social skills. No significant differences were found between the three groups on measures of cognitive or motor skills, although the children of parents receiving PAT services scored higher than did the children from the comparison groups. The results lend further support to educational policies that endorse school efforts to provide outreach services in order to actively involve parents in their children's early development and education.

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Parents as Teachers: Policy Implications for Early School Intervention

Statement of the Problem

Developmental outcomes, both academic and social, are perhaps the most important policy criteria by which educational reform efforts are measured. The Parents as Teachers Program (PAT) (White, 1988) represents one of a number of early intervention programs that share the goal of advancing children's short- and long-term educational accomplishments. Parents are targeted as the centerpiece of the PAT curriculum. PAT educators make home visits in order to provide emotional support to parents, provide them with information regarding child development, and offer practical tips on ways to encourage early learning. Group meetings, developmental screenings, and community referrals are also provided.

PAT has an established record in promoting the early development of children, especially during the first three to four years of life (see White, 1988; Parents as Teacher National Program, 1991). The purpose of this study was to determine if the delivery of PAT services during the first three years of children's lives would result in positive academic outcomes upon children's entry into kindergarten at age 5.

Method

Participants

Families. Three family groups were included in the study for comparison purposes. The first group included 21 families who met three criteria. They entered the PAT program within four months of their child's birth. They remained in the program until their child was between 30 and 36 months of age. They enrolled their child in the local public school kindergarten program

at age 5. These 21 families represented an original data base of 97 families (five-year retention rate of .22). All families resided in the same rural Southeastern county and were collectively referred to as "PAT Families." Recruitment of the families was pursued through the local hospital, as well as through local physicians and social service agencies.

A second group of 22 children from the same county did not receive direct PAT services but their parents did request and receive quarterly educational newsletters during the first year following their child's birth. The newsletters were written by the PAT staff and included information provided to "PAT Families." This group was referred to as "Newsletter Families." A third group of 22 children from the same county received neither PAT services nor newsletters. This group was referred to as "Control Families." Demographic variables were used to match as closely as possible "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families" to "PAT Families" (see Table 1).

PAT educators. A total of nine PAT educators were employed by the school system. All nine educators held teaching degrees and had completed the certification requirements for the state in which the study was conducted. All the educators had also completed the 32 hours of training required for certification as PAT educators. PAT educators worked with no more than 20 families at any single point in time.

Materials

The Early Screening Profiles (Harrison, et. al, 1990) were used by the local school system to assess children's development in four areas. The Cognitive Profile was used to assess children's visual discrimination and understanding of logical relations. The Language Profile was used to assess children's understanding of verbal concepts and their basic school readiness skills. The Motor Profile was used to assess children's gross and fine motor skills. The Self-Help/Social

Profile was used to assess children's communication skills, daily living skills, socialization, and motor skills. Standard scores from each of the profiles were converted into age equivalencies.

Parents were also asked to complete the Home Profile (Harrison, et al 1990). This profile provides an assessment of the educational quality of the home environment (e.g., reading to child; teaching child). Results were reported as standardized scores with higher scores reflecting more educationally enriched home environments.

All the above profiles were developed using a national sample and have well-established measures of validity and reliability (American Guidance Service, 1990).

Procedure

The PAT educators followed the standard PAT curriculum making monthly home visits to deliver educational information about child development, answer parents' questions, provide support to parents, and demonstrate educational activities for use within the home setting and the community PAT educators also conducted developmental assessments throughout the three year service period. These assessments are not addressed in this report.

The Cognitive, Language, Motor, and Self-Help/Social Profiles were administered by school personnel at the beginning of the Kindergarten year and within the school facility. The Home Profile was completed by parents at home and returned to their child's school.

Results

Analysis of variance was used to compare the average age equivalencies and standardized scores of the three groups. Age equivalency results are summarized in Table 2.

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Cognitive Profile

The average Cognitive age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was higher than that of children from "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families." However, the difference was not significant ($F(2, 64) = 1.07$, $p > .05$).

Language Profile

Significant differences were found among the average Language age equivalencies of children from the three groups ($F(2, 64) = 5.76$, $p < .01$). Duncan's Multiple Range Test revealed that the average age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was significantly higher than that of children from "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families." In particular, the average age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was more than 7 months higher (+7.48) than that of children from "Control Families" and more then 9 months higher (+9.25) than that of children from "Newsletter Families." There was no significant difference between the age equivalencies of children from "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families." The age equivalencies of both groups was below that of their chronological age (see Table 2).

Motor Profile

The average Motor age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was higher than that of children from the "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families." However, the difference was not significant ($F(2, 64) = 1.31$, $p > .05$).

Self-Help/Social Profile

Significant differences were found among the average Self-Help/Social age equivalencies of children from the three groups ($F(2, 64) = 4.46$, $p < .05$). Duncan's Multiple Range Test revealed that the average age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was significantly

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higher than that of children from "Newsletter Families" and "Control Families." In particular, the average age equivalency of children from "PAT Families" was more than 12 months higher (+12.62) than that of children from "Control Families" and more than 10 months higher (+10.44) than that of children from "Newsletter Families." The average age equivalency of children from "Newsletter Families" was also significantly higher than that of children from "Control Families," although both groups displayed age equivalencies below that of their chronological ages.

Home Profile

Total scores from the Home Profile approached but did not reach significance ($F(2, 64) = 2.98$, $p = .0580$). The average Home Profile Scores were highest for "PAT Families" ($\bar{X} = 36.28$) and lowest for "Newsletter Families" ($\bar{X} = 33.18$). Separate Analyses of Variance were carried out for each of the twelve items on the Home Profile in order to identify potential differences in specific aspects of the three groups' respective home environments. Only one significant difference distinguished the three family groups. This item involved home-reading (i.e., "How often do you or your spouse find time to read to your child?") ($F(2,64, = 6.58, p < .01$). Duncan's Multiple Range Test revealed that parents from "PAT Families" read to their children significantly more often than did those from "Newsletter Families" but not those from "Control Families." Also, parents from "Control Families" read to their children significantly more often than did those from "Newsletter Families."

Discussion and Implications

Kindergarten screenings revealed that PAT services delivered to children's within their first three years of life resulted in significant educational gains upon entry into kindergarten. Children from "PAT Families" displayed significantly higher Language and Self-Help/Social age

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equivalencies than did children from the two comparison groups. These findings support the value of early educational programs, such as PAT, in advancing children's early school performance. The educational outcomes found in this study are especially noteworthy, given the two-year time lapse that existed between the conclusion of PAT services when the children reached 3 years of age and their subsequent enrollment in kindergarten at age 5.

The poster session will address themes of parent and child confidences associated with outcome scores. The session will also include discussion of project continuation plans, as well as logistical barriers (e.g., funding; tracking; school policies) and design limitations (e.g., matching variables; sample size) associated with the project to date.

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Table 1

Family Group Demographics

Sex

	Female		Male		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
PAT	8	.38	13	.62	0	.00
CONTROL	9	.41	13	.59	0	.00
NEWSLETTER	9	.41	13	.59	0	.00

Race

	Caucasian		African-American		Missing	
	n	%	n	%		
PAT	20	.95	1	.05	0	.00
CONTROL	20	.91	2	.09	0	.00
NEWSLETTER	21	.95	1	.05	0	.00

Father's Occupation

	Professional		Blue Collar		Unemployed		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PAT	8	.38	9	.43	2	.10	2	.10
CONTROL	9	.41	8	.36	0	.00	5	.23
NEWSLETTER	6	.27	11	.50	1	.05	4	.18

Table 1 (Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Mother's Occupation

	Professional		Blue Collar		Housewife		Unemployed		Missing	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PAT	8	.38	8	.38	2	.10	0	.00	3	.14
CONTROL	4	.18	13	.59	4	.18	1	.05	0	.00
NEWSLETTER	3	.14	10	.45	5	.23	2	.09	2	.09

Preschool Attendance

	Did Not Attend		Did Attend		Missing Cases	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
PAT	4	.19	14	.67	3	.14
CONTROL	6	.27	16	.73	0	.00
NEWSLETTER	10	.45	10	.45	2	.09

Length of Preschool Attendance

	< 6 Months		6-12 Months		1-2 Years		> 2 Years		Missing Cases	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
PAT	0	.00	0	.00	4	.19	10	.48	7	.33
CONTROL	0	.00	6	.27	6	.27	4	.18	6	.27
NEWSLETTER	1	.05	1	.05	4	.18	4	.18	12	.55

Table 2

Cognitive, Language, Motor, and Self-Help/Social Profiles

	PAT FAMILIES	CONTROL FAMILIES	NEWSLETTER FAMILIES	F Values
Group Membership	n=21	n=22	n=22	
Chronological Age (CA) (in months, at time of kindergarten screening)	67.19	66.13	65.09	
Age Equivalences (AE) (in months, at time of kindergarten screening)				
Cognitive	66.71	63.41	61.73	1.07
AE - CA	-0.48	-2.72	-3.36	
PAT AE - CONTROL AE = +3.30				
PAT AE - NEWSLETTER AE = +4.98				
Language	69.43	61.95	60.18	5.76*
AE - CA	+2.24	-4.18	-4.91	
PAT AE - CONTROL AE = +7.48				
PAT AE - NEWSLETTER AE = +9.25				
Motor	68.43	63.18	66.91	1.31
AE - CA	+1.24	-2.95	+1.82	
PAT AE - CONTROL AE = +5.25				
PAT AE - NEWSLETTER AE = +1.52				
Self-Help/Social	71.71	59.09	61.27	4.46 **
AE - CA	+4.52	-7.04	-3.82	
PAT AE - CONTROL AE = +12.62				
PAT AE - NEWSLETTER AE = +10.44				

* $p < .01$
** $p < .05$